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ABSTRACT

During the 2001-02 academic year, Idaho State University engaged a nationwide study to investigate the prevalence of dance and cheerleading programs among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) D-I schools. The goal of the study was to build a case for Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and NCAA sport recognition and designation. The study participants included presidents, athletic directors, senior women administrators, and dance/cheerleading coaches from eligible NCAA D-I colleges/universities (sample size 312 schools). Two hundred and seventeen schools responded (34 presidents, 86 athletic directors, 89 senior women administrators, and 80 dance/cheer coaches). Findings revealed that the overwhelming majority of the schools surveyed currently had and were funding competitive dance/cheerleading teams; believed that they had adequate dance/cheer practice and competition facilities on their campuses; felt there were recruitable dance/cheer athletes in their region; and believed that there was potential local, regional, and national dance/cheer competition, beyond support for other sports. Respondents viewed both dance and cheerleading as being characterized by many to most of the defining elements of sport and were at least somewhat supportive of pursuing NCAA emerging sport designation and OCR sport recognition. (Author/SM)

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Dance and Cheerleading as Competitive Sports: Making a Case for OCR Sport Recognition & NCAA Emerging Sport Designation

ED 479 762

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Abstract

During the 2001-2002 academic year Idaho State University engaged a nation-wide study to investigate the prevalence of dance and cheerleading programs among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) D-I schools. The goal of the study was to build a case for Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and NCAA sport recognition and designation. The study participants included presidents, athletic directors, senior woman administrators and dance/cheerleading coaches from eligible NCAA D-I colleges/universities (sample size 312 schools). Two hundred and seventeen schools responded (34 presidents, 86 athletic directors, 89 senior women administrators, and 80 dance/cheer coaches). Findings revealed that the overwhelming majority of the schools surveyed currently had and were funding competitive dance/cheerleading teams, believed they had adequate dance/cheer practice and competition facilities on their campuses, felt there were recruitable dance/cheer athletes in their region, and that there was potential local, regional and national dance/cheer competition, beyond support for other sports. Respondents viewed both dance and cheerleading as being characterized by many to most of the defining elements of sport, and were at least somewhat supportive of pursuing NCAA emerging sport designation and OCR sport recognition.

Introduction & Background

The educational history of sport begins as the history of sport for boys and men. Early on, school sport was seen as a "...panacea...that would reduce the dropout problem, create a masculine environment, and give unruly males an energy outlet - and schools a public relations bonanza" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 215). Introduced into the curriculum based on the rough and tumble games played by young boys, interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic programs quickly grew in both quantity and quality throughout the educational system. The end result was a large, well-organized male dominated sport model, grounded in community and curriculum-based sport programs, with an established pinnacle of professional athletics.

Historically, sport for women and girls originated to "...address the expressed need for healthful exercise for women..." (Huckaby, 1994, p. 48); and, unlike the competitive warrior model characteristic of men's sports, women's sports were rooted in philosophies of participation, cooperation and play. The female sport culture emphasized enjoyment and social competition with the ultimate contest goals being those of self-development and teamwork, as opposed to winning and individual elitism (Blinde, 1989; Festle, 1996; Hill, 1993). For women and girls school sport competition evolved from a tradition of play and sports days, as opposed to head-to-head competition (Huckaby, 1994); and, until fairly recently, professional sport opportunities simply did not exist.

Valuing & Defining Sport

Sport participation can, and often does, result in positive physical, mental and social outcomes. However, the norms and values that underlie the sport experience have

been, and remain, at least somewhat sex specific. Research shows that at least some females value sport participation differently than males (Lumpkin, 1984).

A 5-year longitudinal study Butcher and Hall (1983) found that as girls mature they become less motivated by competition and more motivated by physical activity as a release of tension. They also found that positive perceptions relative to the image of female athletes declined with age. Greendorfer (1987) found that female college athletes cited too much emphasis on winning, not enough playing time, and a lack of fun as primary reasons for dropping out of intercollegiate sports. The 1988 Wilson Report interviewed 513 girls – over half of which (58%) indicated fun as the primary motivator of sport participation. More recently, Munger (2002) conducted a study of NCAA D-I women basketball players who chose to prematurely terminate their sport career. The results of this study showed that for females, perceptions of diminished fun and relational supports, along with competing priorities, outweighed sport specific benefits (i.e., fitness, scholarships, competition, etc.).

The history, traditions and socio-cultural context within which sport opportunities have emerged and evolved, are different for females and males. Perhaps in part because of this, research indicates that in some instances females define and value competitive sport experiences differently than their male counterparts.

Sport has been broadly defined by physical, performance and psycho-social elements. The physical elements have been categorized as health related (i.e., cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and body composition) and motor-skill related (i.e., agility, balance, coordination, power, reaction time, and speed) (Freeman, 1997; Hoeger & Hoeger, 1999; Lumpkin, Stroll, & Beller,

1999; McPherson, Curtis, & Loy, 1989; Nixon, 1984). Performance elements include structure and organization, rules, judging criteria and goal orientation. Psycho-social elements include competition & contests, play, games, and activity (Lumpkin, et al., 1999, Nixon, 1984).

Competition, in particular, has been a key definitional element of sport recognition and designation by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). According to the OCR (2000) an activity is a sport if: (a) Selection for the team is based upon objective factors related primarily to athletic ability; (b) the activity is limited to a defined season; (c) the team prepares for or engages in competition in the same way as other teams in the athletic program with respect to coaching, recruitment, budget, try-outs and eligibility, and length and number of practice sessions and competitive opportunities; (d) the activity is administered by the athletic department; and (e) the primary purpose of the activity is athletic competition and not the support or promotion of other events. The NCAA's definition of sport includes an institutionalized activity involving physical exertion with the primary purpose being competition versus other teams or individuals within a collegiate competition structure. The NCAA further defines sport as including structure (standardized rules approved by official regulatory agencies and governing bodies), regularly scheduled competitions, and a defined competitive season consisting of five or more competitions per year.

According to the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) (2000) sport is defined by several components, and, as with the OCR and NCAA, competition is key. These components are: (a) A physical activity which involves propelling a mass through space or overcoming the resistance of a mass; (b) a contest or competition against/with an

opponent; (c) governed by the rules which explicitly define the time, space and purpose of the contest and the conditions under which a winner is declared; and (d) the acknowledged primary purpose of the competition is a comparison of the relative skill of the participants.

As the above illustrates, the defining elements of sport, as recognized and designated by the OCR, NCAA and WSF may, at least in some cases, be more closely linked to the history, traditions and culture of the male sport experience than that of the female sport experience.

Sport Participation

Historically, sport opportunities for women and girls have been limited (Blinde, 1989; Coakley, 2001; Festle, 1996; Greendorfer, 1987; "High-School," 2001; Hill, 1993; NCAA, 2000; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Uhlir, 1982; Women's Sports Foundation, 2002; Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998). However, when Title IX of the Education Amendments was passed in 1972, a new sport era began for women and girls. Specifically, Title IX was designed to proactively address historical wrongs and ensure gender equity relative to educational opportunities, including educational-athletic opportunities, and the impact on school sport was nothing short of amazing.

In 1971 less than 300,000 girls played high school sports (approximately 1 in 27) and women made up only 15% of all college athletes. Today over 2 million girls play sports at the high school level (approximately 1 in 3), and women make up over 33% of varsity collegiate athletes, and almost 40% of U.S. Olympic team athletes (NCAA, 2003; NCWGW, 2002; U.S. GAO, 2000; Women's Sports Foundation, 2002). Although equity has yet to be fully achieved female athletes have gained not only in sport opportunities,

but in sport specific supports (operating budgets, coaching, media recognition, etc.), and scholarship dollars (NCAA, 2003; NCWGW, 2002; U.S. GAO, 2000; Women's Sports Foundation, 1995 & 2002). Clearly, over the past 30 years women and girls have begun participating and competing in sports in increasing numbers. Interestingly, according to the NCAA (2000) the women's sport that has experienced the most growth has been competitive spirit squad (i.e., cheerleading). A similar phenomenon has occurred at the high school level. In 1998 girls' sport participation in competitive spirit squads totaled 58,737, by the year 2000 that number had grown to 88,561, an increase of more than 29,000 participants in a two-year span ("High-School," 2001). Currently, fourteen states identify cheerleading as a sport, and nearly 200 colleges offer cheerleading scholarships (NCAA, 2000; Campo-Flores, 2001; Durrett, 1999). Dance also has been gaining ground in the competitive ranks. DanceSport, a competitive partner activity, will become an Olympic event in 2008 (Durrett, 1999). According to Valdes, president of DanceSport World Group in Stamford, Connecticut, DanceSport requires endurance, quickness, flexibility and strength (Durrett, 1999).

During 2001-2002, the National Dance Association and the National Cheerleading Association conducted 21 different organized dance and cheerleading competitions, many of which were televised on ESPN. Yet, despite popularity and increasingly competitive focus, dance and cheerleading are not uniformly recognized as "sports" by the OCR or NCAA.

Idaho State University Research

During the 2000-2001 academic year, Idaho State University conducted a phone survey among dance coaches at 13 regional universities. The study asked 12 questions ranging from whether or not the university sponsored a dance team, to perceptions about dance as a sport, to whether or not coaches felt that their university would be interested in supporting and pursuing dance as a NCAA sport. Ninety-two percent (12 out of 13) of respondents affirmed that either they had a dance team currently, or were interested in starting a dance team. Fifty-four percent (7 of 13) felt dance was a sport. A strong majority (77%) stated that they would like to see dance recognized as a NCAA sport, and 62% (8 out of 13) believed their university would be interested in supporting and pursuing dance as a NCAA sport.

Based on the results of this pilot work, a two-prong study was designed to collect nation-wide information pertinent to investigating the prevalence of dance and cheerleading programs among NCAA D-I schools, and lay groundwork for building a dance/cheerleading case for OCR sport recognition, and NCAA emerging sport designation. The research question were:

1. What is the prevalence of dance and spirit-cheerleading programs among NCAA schools?
2. What are the perceptions among presidents, athletic directors, senior women administrators, and coaches at NCAA schools regarding dance and spirit-cheerleading programs as emerging intercollegiate sports?

The participants were presidents, athletic directors, senior woman administrators and dance/cheerleading coaches from eligible NCAA D-I colleges/universities (sample

size 312 schools and 1284 participants). The questionnaire was drafted based on the 2000-2001 pilot study mentioned above, then finalized through a process involving input from athletic directors and dance/cheer coaches, as well as NCAA/OCR sport recognition/emerging sport designation criteria.

Survey packets (introductory letters, informed consent and the dance/cheerleading questionnaire) were mailed February 2002. Questionnaires were coded to preserve participant confidentiality. Data analysis involved basic descriptive statistics, response frequencies and corresponding percentages.

Two hundred and seventeen schools responded (out of 312). The responding participants included 34 presidents (11.76%), 86 athletic directors (29.75%), 89 senior women administrators (30.80%), and 80 dance/cheerleading coaches (27.68%). The aggregate findings appear in the following tables.

Findings

Tables 1, 2 and 3 display key study findings relative to demographic data, defining sport elements and competition. As displayed in Table 1 a large percentage of the responding NCAA D-I institutions indicated they were currently sponsoring competitive dance and cheerleading teams (88.5%/97.7%). Some award scholarships (partial and full), and the majority indicated they had adequate practice and competition facilities. Approximately 30-45% (dance/cheerleading) indicated their athletic department was the primary source of program funding support. Almost a quarter of the dance programs, and over 40% of the cheerleading programs, indicated they belonged to either the Universal Dance/ Cheerleading Association or the National Dance/Cheerleading

Association—which implies organizational structure and adherence to standardized rules and guidelines. Over 80% of the respondents indicated that there were ample high school level dancers/cheerleaders in their region to recruit from, and over 70% indicated they believed there were other schools in their conference they could compete with.

Table 1: Summary Findings Dance/Cheerleading NCAA D-I Demographics

Sport Elements/Criteria N=289	Dance (#)	Dance (%)	Cheer (#)	Cheer (%)
Sport Sponsorship	192	88.5%	212	97.7%
Average Team Size	16.9		22.1	
Currently Award Scholarships				
-Full	00		02	01.1%
-Partial	29	15.7%	68	36.8%
Have Adequate Facilities (practice & competition)	174	60.2%	174	60.2%
Top Sources of Program Funding				
-Athletic Department		29.7%		45.9%
-Institutional Funds		28.1%		31.9%
-Fundraising		07.6%		08.1%
Current National Affiliations				
-Universal Dance/Cheer Association (UDA/UCA)		18.4%		26.7%
-National Dance/Cheer Association (NDA/NCA)		06.5%		14.0%

Relative to defining dance and cheerleading as sports, as displayed in Table 2, the vast majority indicated that dance and cheerleading (80.6%/85.5%) were characterized by fitness, and a strong majority identified the physical elements that typically define sport and athleticism (endurance, strength, power, agility, flexibility) as inherent in dance and cheerleading. With regard to the performance and psycho-social elements that define sport, a majority identified structure and organization as well as competition as defining aspects of dance and cheerleading. Almost half of the respondents identified rules and

judging criteria as defining elements of dance, and over half identified them as requisite for cheerleading.

When asked if they believed dance/cheerleading "could" be developed as NCAA emerging sports, over 40% agreed or strongly agreed that dance could, and over 55% agreed or strongly agreed that cheerleading could. Approximately a third indicated they would like to see dance become a NCAA emerging sport, and nearly half (46.0%) indicated they would like to see cheerleading become a NCAA emerging sport. Similarly, 35.6% (dance) and 46.7% (cheerleading) indicated they believed their school would consider making dance/cheerleading varsity sports if they were NCAA emerging sports. A strong majority said their school would be willing to follow NCAA rules and regulations if dance/cheerleading were designated as emerging sports.

Table 2: Summary Findings Dance/Cheerleading NCAA D-I Sport Elements/Criteria

Sport Elements/Criteria N=289	Dance (#)	Dance (%)	Cheer (#)	Cheer (%)
Sport Definition				
Physical				
-Fitness	233	80.6%	247	85.5%
-Endurance/Strength/Power/Agility/ Flexibility	188	65.1%	228	79.1%
Performance & Psycho-social				
-Structure & Organization	198	68.5%	230	79.6%
-Rules & Judging Criteria	138	47.7%	168	58.3%
-Competition	150	51.9%	185	64.0%
Sport Designation/Recognition (% respondents agree/strongly agree)				
Could be a NCAA emerging sport?	118	40.8%	160	55.3%
Would like it to be a NCAA emerging sport?	94	32.5%	133	46.0%
Would consider making it a varsity sport if a NCAA emerging sport?	103	35.6%	135	46.7%
Willing to follow rules/regulations if a NCAA emerging sport?	189	65.4%	204	70.6%
Write an emerging sport letter of support? (presidents and/or athletic directors)	19		22	
Sport Support/Recruiting Potential (% respondents agree/strongly agree)				
High school (recruiting base)	243	84.1%	243	84.1%
Conference Competition Potential	203	70.2%	203	70.2%

Specific to aspects of competition, Table 3 reveals that 86.8%-92.7% (dance/cheerleading) believed relative performance could be judged, and over 70% believed judging could be similar to gymnastics or synchronized swimming (both of which are recognized as sports by the OCR and NCAA). Although the most common events that the dance and cheerleading programs in this study performed at were men's

and women's sport events, followed by local exhibitions and national competitions, a quarter to a third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their school would be willing to support dance/cheerleading performance/competition – beyond support for other sporting events. Thirty-two to 40.1% (dance/cheerleading) believed their school would be willing to participate in a minimum of 5 seasonal competitions per year, and 43.6%/52.3% (dance/cheerleading) believed their school would willingly support competitions leading up to a national championship.

Table 3: Summary Findings Dance/Cheerleading NCAA D-I Competition

Sport Elements/Criteria N=289	Dance (#)	Dance (%)	Cheer (#)	Cheer (%)
Rules & Judging/Competition (% respondents agree/strongly agree)				
Relative performance judged?	251	86.8%	268	92.7%
Can be judged like gymnastics or synchronized swimming?	207	71.6%	222	76.8%
Willing to support performance beyond support for "other" events?	72	24.9%	92	31.8%
Season				
-Willing to participate in min 5 seasonal competitions/year?	94	32.5%	116	40.1%
- Willing to participate in competitions leading up to a national championship?	126	43.6%	151	52.3%

Conclusion

Achieving OCR sport recognition and NCAA emerging sport status for competitive dance and cheerleading will require a paradigm shift. Long-standing socio-cultural perceptions, stereotypes and performance limitations must be put aside; and a broadened definition of sport, inclusive of, and valuing, both male and female sport histories, traditions and culture must emerge. There is nothing inherent in the nature of

dance and/or cheerleading that prohibits the evolution of a participation/performance model inclusive of both competition and entertainment; and in fact, as the results of this study substantiate, at the NCAA D-I level, in many instances competitive dance and cheerleading have already evolved beyond sis-boom-bah and half-time entertainment.

Broadening the definition, recognition and designation of what is and is not considered sport should not be a zero-sum, either/or proposition. Including competitive dance and cheerleading as part of a growing sport participation menu for women and girls does not take away from existing sport participation experiences, but adds to it, and thereby allows women and girls who have chosen to express their athleticism through dance and cheerleading the status, recognition and benefits of their athletic peers. To deny them these things perpetuates a definition of sport narrowly delimited by "…men's values, men's understanding of the world and men's experiences…" (Blinde, 1989, p. 37).

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